

NATIVE SONS OF THE GOLDEN WEST
PEBBLE BEACH PARLOR #230 PESCADERO, CALIFORNIA
STEELHEAD COMMITTEE

3/15/2008

To: North Central Coast MLPA Stakeholder Group Members and other interested parties

Re: Proposal to designate the Pescadero lagoon, San Mateo County as a State Marine Reserve

Our local fishing community has been following the series of draft proposals for the North Central Coast State Marine Protected Area Project, with particular interest in the suggested designation of the Pescadero Lagoon/Marsh complex in San Mateo County as a State Marine Reserve. Such as designation would eliminate the current limited, regulated recreational fishing opportunities in the Pescadero / Butano Creek complex. In November, we presented written and oral comments regarding our opposition to such as designation.

Our points include:

- Pescadero Lagoon has been historically and is currently open for recreational steelhead fishing on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays (and holidays) during the months of December, January and February. This is a “no take / catch and release” fishery, restricted to barbless hooks.
- The only fishing that occurs in the Lagoon, for any species, is for steelhead during this limited season. At other times of the year, there is no fishing allowed in this watershed. With these current restrictions in place, we believe eliminating recreational steelhead fishing in this Lagoon would not provide substantially more protection for this species, but it would eliminate the only high-quality non-ocean/bay steelhead fishing opportunity in San Mateo County.
- Generations of steelhead fishermen continue to treasure Pescadero Lagoon and the Pescadero steelhead run, and have contributed a great deal of volunteer effort and funding to fish habitat restoration activities in the Pescadero watershed. These efforts have resulted in advocacy, funding and man power to address migration barriers in the tributary streams of Pescadero and important fishery protection projects in the lagoon complex within the State Parks Natural Preserve area.

After our original letter, the only ‘justification’ we have seen noted in the Stake Holders’ written rationale for designation of the Pescadero complex for SMR protection that the designation is necessary due to the impact of “Catch and Release,” barbless hook fishing on Steelhead.

We question why the Pescadero Creek complex is selected for concern when Catch and Release fishing for steelhead is the norm within California. Streams throughout the Central Coast (including many streams which were the subject of the previous Central Coast SMPA process such as the Big Sur, Little Sur, Carmel, Pajaro, San Lorenzo, Scott and Waddell Creeks) all have designated Catch and Release fishing regulations similar to those in Pescadero. Additionally, many streams within the North Central Coast Project area (such as the Garcia and Gualala) have even more liberal catch and release seasons, but are not subject to the same concern as expressed by the Draft Proposal for the Pescadero.

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Over the past 10 years, our fishing group has met many times with CDFG local biologists, Regional Managers and State Directors, NOAA Fisheries local biologists and SW Regional Managers, USF&WS regulatory and funding partners, California Coastal Conservancy and Coastal Commission staff, local and state representatives from State Parks and local Assembly representatives regarding restoration and protection opportunities for species enhancement in the Pescadero Creek complex. In none of our meetings, individually or in facilitated forums, has “Catch and Release” fishing been suggested as having an impact on the steelhead population. Often, however, State and Federal agencies have expressed gratitude to the our small fishing community for our concern, support and generational diligence.

In conclusion, we are not persuaded that the restrictive access and prohibition of fishing which follows a State Marine Reserve designation is warranted from a conservation perspective in Pescadero lagoon / steam complex. However, we are certain that eliminating recreational fishing in Pescadero Lagoon would result the loss of an important local recreational activity, the interruption of historic use, potential loss of local support towards steelhead conservation as the Lagoon’s ‘constituency’ fades, and reduction in inputs to the local economy provided by steelhead fishermen and their families.

These arguments have been supported in written comments by groups such as CalTrout, the Northern California Federation of Fly Fishers, other local fishing groups and local residents.

We therefore strongly urge that Pescadero Lagoon **not** be designated as a State Marine Reserve or any other designation that would eliminate Catch and Release steelhead fishing.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Tim Frahm